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Segregation- The act of sequestering

-Charlotte Foster

When you see the historical picture of the white water fountain on the wall with the sign above that says "Whites Only" you immediately have a negative connotation of the word segregation. According to Merriam-Webster segregation means the separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means.

The words "barriers", "restricted", "discriminatory" leave a negative picture in your mind. When the negative words are taken out of the definition of segregation, individual choice and the ability to self-segregate or integrate for a more diverse environment appears. Self-segregation may not be a word found in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, but according to Ethan Lee of DeAnza College of Cupertino, California, self-segregation is defined as voluntarily segregating oneself to a particular racial group. Self-segregation also takes place in socio-economic groups, religious groups, educational groups, and other groups that have similar interests and/or abilities. The ability to choose who to interact with is what gives educational and other social systems the opportunity to self-segregate and integrate at will and when necessary.

Choosing to self-segregate makes the world a more diverse place in many instances. People with motorcycle interests may choose to hang out with other bikers. A group of bikers may have a common interest but can be as diverse as a doctor that is a biker or a janitor that is into biking. Formally educated people may choose to spend time with other formally educated people and both groups may have different racial backgrounds. People with religious preferences may worship together as well, and the worshippers may or may not be of mixed races or have cultural differences. The beauty of having a choice of whom to spend time with can cross many boundaries and have an extremely positive impact on cultural diversity.

If observing students from elementary school through college, the observer may find that racial groups appear to self-segregate. Segregation by race seems very widespread among students playing basketball in the gym, sitting in the classroom, eating meals, worshipping at church. Not only do these students appear to segregate by race or ethnicity, but by gender as well.

A study by Clack, Dixon, and Tredoux (2004) found that all-female groups were half as likely to interact with those of other ethnicity as male or mixed gender groups. People have the choice to integrate and grow as individuals but they may not

always choose to do so. According to Bronson and Merryman (2009) in an article in Newsweek magazine, white kids' odds of having friends from another race are only about 8% and black kids' odds of having friends from another race are about 15%. Most children and adults choose to spend time with people that are like themselves because it is comfortable and easy to do.

One aspect that contributes to the segregation found among high school students that has been often overlooked in research is the notion of popularity. According to Bronson and Merryman (2000), the fact that kids are trying hard to find their own identity makes popularity a very important factor in the identity seeking process. Students that have friends of the same race were found to be more popular than those who have friends of different races. This makes a strong argument for the natural draw to self-segregation for students.

Another observation gleaned from the Clack (2004) study was the fact that pre-existing relationships have been key to the pattern of segregation. Students that have friendships from the neighborhood, church, and other settings will often transfer those integration patterns to educational settings. Students often choose to follow familiar self-segregation patterns because it is easier than making new friends.

The "perception" of segregation does not always seem to match the research based on "observations" of groups of students previously mentioned. Anthony Antonio, assistant professor of education at Stanford University, studied student perceptions of racial self-segregation and found that "more than 90% of student in his surveys agreed that students predominantly cluster by race and ethnicity on campus." The students' perception was that they commonly self-segregate. Antonio's (1999) study continues to go beyond college student perception surveys and reveals the fact that only 17% of the UCLA students actually had friendship groups that were racially and ethnically homogeneous. Students and adults may truly be more integrated in relationships than they actually are aware of.

The perception from students of self-segregation is also in direct conflict with the research of Hurtado, Dey, and Treviño (1991) where students at 390 institutions across the country were observed at a fairly high rate of actual integration. According to the study, "Sixty nine percent of Asian Americans and 78% of Mexican American students frequently dined with someone of a different ethnic or racial background compared with 55% of African American students and 21% of white students."

Having the choice, resources, and knowledge to make decisions about self-segregation is healthy. Students and

colleagues will self-segregate in the workplace, at basketball games, in class, at church, but they also have the ability and responsibility to reach out and learn from others that are not similar in culture, educational level, financial ability, and physical state of being in order to reap the benefits of what others have to offer. Public school systems, places of employment, cultural centers, and other places that people interact should not be allowed to take the freedom of choice to self-segregate or integrate from anyone. Standards can be made and bars can be set high when cultural, financial, religious, racial, and other forms of division are not a limiting factor to education and to society.

Segregation can be a very harmful action. That is how narrow-minded citizens are made. That is how hate groups are formed. That is how some students receive a better education than others. Culturally isolated schools may separate themselves from the benefits that integrated schools receive like the benefit of resolving cultural conflicts (Nieto & Bode, 2008). Segregation is not what our country is about. Most of the negatively charged racial problems in the news can be traced back to some type of forced segregation. When those in power make decisions based on the inclusion of multiple facets of diversity, then the choices can be made by individuals to self-segregate at times and integrate at others.

The definition of segregation may contain many negative words but self-segregation can be filled with positives. The key to school boards creating diverse educational environments, students embracing diversity in the classroom, and colleagues reaping the benefits of cultural diversity all lie in the choices people make. These choices should never be limited or restricted by those in power. Segregation should be replaced throughout our educational systems and social systems by self-segregation and integration to provide opportunities beneficial to social and emotional growth.

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A Case Study of Social and Media Influence on Religion

-Miranda Dawn Emery

Abstract

This paper seeks to understand different religions and cultures by comparing and contrasting the similarities, differences, and opinions found within two religious/cultural groups. This case study uses the Social Learning Theory of communication to illustrate how perceptions of others are formed in a community with a growing Muslim population. It also uses the Cultivation theory to illustrate how news media has an effect on perception in this community. In addition, this research seeks to explore the opinions of individuals in regard to how they feel their religion/culture is portrayed in the media and to what extent they feel media coverage has an effect on stereotypes put on their religion/culture. This research uses a focus group, elite interviews, document review, and observation. Findings include social learning methods, similarities/differences between religions, varying perceptions, and a significant media influence.

Keywords: religion, culture, media, Social Learning theory, Cultivation theory, qualitative, perceptions

Introduction

Since the events surrounding the fall of the World Trade Center by members of Al Qaida (Tidgewell, 2007, p. 2), who claimed their act was in the name of Islam, non-Muslim Americans have become not only more aware of those that surround them but also afraid and angry toward Muslims in American. Around the ninth anniversary of 9/11, plans for an Islamic center, also called mosque (English) or masjid (Arabic), were announced. The plans were for building the center within blocks of the attack nine years earlier. This announcement caused a lot of debate within the media.

This paper represents a case study to demonstrate the dynamics of the understanding between different religions and cultures by comparing and contrasting the similarities, differences, opinions, etc found within religious/cultural groups.

In a middle-sized, southern city, this research uses the Social Learning Theory of communication to illustrate how perceptions of others are formed. In addition, this research seeks to explore the opinions of individuals in regards to how they feel their religion/culture is portrayed in the media and to what extent they feel media coverage is objective about their religion/culture. The Cultivation Theory is used to explain how media has an effect on actions and the perceptions of others. Document reviews on religious texts are used to more clearly explain religious beliefs as they are discussed within the paper.

Research questions posed for this research are as follows:

RQ1: How are perceptions and behavior formed in relation to religion?

RQ2: What are the similarities and differences across religions/cultures in a middle-sized southern city?

RQ3: What are perceptions people have about their own religion/culture and of other cultures/religions in a middle-sized southern city?

RQ4: How does the media affect the perceptions people have on culture and religion in middle-sized southern city?

The purpose of this research is to better understand religion and why there is tension between religious groups. While the dynamics of such interactions are unique in various communities, the case study approach seeks to provide trends and examples that may be applied to other communities. The research questions above need to be addressed because by documenting how members of differing religious groups perceive themselves, their religion and other religions, similarities across religious lines may surface and provide support that, as humans, we are all similar in some ways. From a communications standpoint, similarities may serve as a unifier in areas such as communicating with and/or advertising to diverse publics. Similarly, differences found may aid in targeting a more specific audiences whether in advertising or other forms of communications.

Addressing how individuals perceive the media in this equation may help mass media professionals understand how to more efficiently report to and write about varying groups, which will then influence the perceptions of the general public, according to the Cultivation Theory of communications. Research question four is necessary to gain understanding of how members of a religious or cultural group are socialized into said religion/culture.

The Social Learning Theory of communications explains how perceptions and behavior are learned socially within a community or family over a period of time, which supports the socialization into a religion/culture.

Literature Review

Social Learning Theory



Picture Source: euranet.eu

Most people have been accused of speaking like their mother or standing just like their father, but why? In 1977, Albert Bandura published his Social Learning Theory. "Social learning theory approaches the explanation of human behavior in terms of a